

# **Report on Input from Interactive Session at May 31, 2003**

## **Southern resident Killer Whale**

### **Introductory Conservation Planning Meeting**

At the May 31 meeting we had an interactive session with several stations. Each station represented a topic that had been previously identified as important to the conservation of these animals. We asked participants to consider some questions and write their input concerning the questions on each topic. The questions were:

- Do you have ideas or suggested measures for a panel discussion to develop methods to improve the current condition?
- Do you have recommendations on individuals (groups) or types of expertise that should be represented on the discussion panel?
- Do you have recommendations regarding which management, regulatory or research agencies that may have information useful to this discussion panel?

Below is simply a transcript of the input we received, with no editing, comments or additions. This input will be addressed as we hold workshops and work through these issues during our conservation planning process. The stations/subject areas were:

[Pollution](#)

[Prey Availability](#)

[Other Factors](#)

[Vessel Effects](#)

[Defining Conservation](#)

[What Can We Do Now?](#)

#### **POLLUTION**

*Station introduction:* "Pollution and related effects dominated the majority of public comments received on the proposed rule to designate the southern Resident stock as depleted."

*Questions asked to address:*

- Do you have ideas or suggested measures for a panel discussion to develop methods to improve the current condition?
- Do you have recommendations on individuals (groups) or types of expertise that should be represented on the discussion panel?
- Do you have recommendations regarding which management, regulatory or research agencies that may have information useful to this discussion panel?

*Input received:*

- Oil spill prevention is top priority.
- Please establish harbor seal monitoring off N. end of C? Island or anywhere near Cherry Point for long-term assessment of ongoing toxic inputs.
- Ask EPA for current status of clean-up of marine affecting pollution. Ask EPA for plan that best prioritizes a reduction in orca toxic loading.
- Need to accelerate superfund cleanups and engage EPA and Dept. of Ecology as soon as possible.

- Address and mitigate harmful effects of “cosmetic” lawn care (i.e. golf courses).
- Whale friendly garden signs.
- More public outreach and education. Put it in the classrooms, newspapers, marinas, etc.
- Public Education! This is an issue that the public can participate in every day. Educating them on what chemicals to buy or not buy, tell them what their choices are, how they can change what they do in their everyday lives to make a difference.
- Monumental causes of orca decline cannot be addressed by external agency/NGO effort alone. Ongoing recruitment and education of public is essential. It must be collaborative (state, county, NGO) and high profile. The goal? To change consumer choices from toxic-based lifestyles to non-toxic (as close as possible) choices/lifestyles. We will fail without it.
- ID short-term actions ASAP involving all the relevant agencies, fed, state and local.
- Consultation with USGS, vessel operators, cruise ships. GSX type projects. Pipeline impact mitigates-prevented in “orca pass.”
- Conservation needs to include the entire Salish Sea Ecosystem from the Cascadia crest to the sea.
- Include groups like the Mountaineers and Sierra Club as well as water-based organizations who are already involved.
- Invite/work with WA Toxics Coalition.
- Public Education- via non-profit orgs, schools, whale-watch boats.
- Work with the military to stop dumping of toxics. Up funding/timelines fo superfund site clean-ups.
- Noise pollution- Assessment of all types of vessel noise, limit noise during resident presence in San Juans.
- A standardization needs to be in place for laboratory analyses of contaminants from killer whale tissue between agencies.
- Don’t get so focused on research that actions are delayed.
- Do non-invasive research. Don’t let research into the issues become an issue itself.

## **PREY AVAILABILITY**

*Station introduction:* “Inconsistent quantity or quality of prey because of over fishing, shoreline development, dams or other habitat degradation that limit forage fish production were listed in public comments on the proposed rule to designate the Southern Resident stock as depleted.”

*Questions asked to address:*

- Do you have ideas or suggested measures for a panel discussion to develop methods to improve the current condition?
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*Input received:*

- Increase herring spawning areas (eelgrass, ???) throughout Sound and San Juan County.
- Increased surf smelt sandlance restoration funding in San Juan County and Puget Sound.
- Ecosystem approach includes herring, eel grass, etc.

- Increased funding for eelgrass, forage fish protection, conservation and assessment.
- Conservation requires balance among populations of indigenous species- may need to speak to salmon, herring and groundfish numbers that relate to orca numbers.
- Provide salmon allocation for orca in quotas.
- Enhance spring chinook. Have NOAA Fisheries fund Elwha restoration.
- List Cherry Point herring as threatened.
- Stop factory farm fish pens.
- Stop eating fish now!
- Prioritize recovery of fish in clean areas.
- Utilize “local knowledge” in central/south Puget Sound -- people like Mark Sears -- to learn more about prey resources for SRKW in fall/winter.
- Be open to looking for prey besides chinook, consider herring in central Puget Sound.
- Need much more vigorous effort to protect and restore shoreline habitat.
- If possible encourage local govt. with tools to provide incentives to property owners who remove/modify their shoreline structures (bulkheads, armoring, etc.)
- NOAA’s salmon recovery process seems very slow and not very focused on short-term actions.
- Need to ID short-term management actions ASAP! And involve all of the agencies -- fed, state, local.
- Less on research and more on ACTION.
- Don’t get so focused on research that actions are put off.
- Coordinate with Shared Strategy.

## **OTHER FACTORS**

*Station introduction:* “Commenters on the proposed rule raised a number of issues that may affect killer whales or the conservation planning process.”

*Questions asked to address:*

- Do you have ideas or suggested measures for a panel discussion to develop methods to improve the current condition?
- Do you have recommendations on individuals (groups) or types of expertise that should be represented on the discussion panel?
- Do you have recommendations regarding which management, regulatory or research agencies that may have information useful to this discussion panel?

*Input received:*

- Review marine mammal stranding records in light of military exercises from California to British Columbia. Halt discretionary use of munitions and sonar until review is completed.
- Get Navy to stop sonar use in orca territory.
- NW Straits Commission is very concerned about sonar issue.
- Stop sonar exercises NOW. Also explosives testing, discharge of depleted uranium, etc..
- Channel funding to Soundwatch and support with federal, state existing infrastructure.
- Encourage the establishment of Marine Protected Areas.
- Stop eating fish now!
- Check for possibility of entanglements in offshore waters.
- Return the missing “L” whales -- Luna and Lolita.

- Include assessment into conservation plan- provisions for monitoring.
- Interim management strategies. Interagency MOU with WDFW, NOAA to discuss.
- Don't get so focused on research that actions are put off.
- Are we working cooperatively with people who might be doing similar research. I'm concerned with invasive techniques (biopsy darting) on animals who have already been shot. Are we "double dipping?" What is in place now? Just curious.
- Make sure the research you do as part of the process does not become a part of the problem -- favor non-invasive research.
- Need to ID short-term management actions ASAP, and involve all the agencies- fed, state, local.
- Have an inter-agency/NGO management issues meeting- focus on the short-term mitigation factors.

## VESSEL EFFECTS

*Station introduction:* "Noise and stress associated with vessel activities and whale watching were among the concerns listed in public comments on the proposed rule to designate the Southern Resident stock as depleted."

*Questions asked to address:*

- Do you have ideas or suggested measures for a panel discussion to develop methods to improve the current condition?
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*Input received:*

- Soundwatch and M3 are operational support, compliance and vessel traffic research.
- NEED BOAT DAYS! 150 boat days, \$350 USD/\$500 Canadian per day M3 and Soundwatch.
- Recognize Soundwatch data on vessel numbers and activities around whales as research -- in fact NMFS uses Soundwatch numbers already.
- Compliance data, whale habitat use- Soundwatch research platform.
- Create long term theodolite site and monitor effect of changes in whale watch activities on whale behavior.
- Err on the side of caution -- implement something now, create a sanctuary, whale-watching by permit only/regulated.
- Reduce number of vessels within 400 yards. Get on with regulations!
- I'm very concerned with the hours of days (morning to dusk) that the Southern residents are exposed to boats. Seven days a week. It's disturbing to see the numbers!
- Whale-watch management needs looking into beyond just "potential" impacts (i.e. vessel noise, etc.)
- License whale-watch operators.
- Stop whale-watching in Puget Sound in the winter. Keep winter habitat safe!
- Baseline acoustic conditions must be established in central and south Puget Sound before subjecting the SRKW to additional noise from increased fall/winter boat-based whale watching.
- Recreational whale-watching needs controls -- a week ago Friday I observed a calf in J pod fall off its mother's slip stream and porpoise to catch up. There were only six whale-watching boats in the vicinity -- but they were keeping pace -- outside of 100 meters -- but having an

effect. What will this summer bring?

- Noise from significant volume of commercial shipping traffic should be factored in.
- I want enforcement (\$-fine people) and media to educate those who are on the water.
- Hold a workshop among scientists, enforcement, and interested public to educate each other about things like being a good witness and what behavioral changes are good evidence that a take has occurred.
- Coordinate with other enforcement agencies. U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs, NOAA Fisheries enforcement, and WDFW have all had a presence in the San Juan Islands over the last month or so. Formal coordination among agencies may lead to adequate presence until dedicated funding is available.
- Less on research, more on action this summer. More on enforcement. Can't have guidelines and no one to enforce them. Guidelines are not regulations.
- Create flier for all marinas, issue NOTAMS asking mariners to keep distance, issue advice and remind them these orcas are under stress and in danger of extinction.
- Develop shore-based viewing- economic development opportunities.
- NOAA Fisheries should deal with all sources of significant noise and disturbance, but don't put this issue above toxics and salmon recovery.
- Needs international approach.
- Need a Navy commanding officer to attend these orca workshops -- we want their perspective as military officials.
- If we are serious about recovering this orca population, the Navy should be banned from use of sonar in Puget Sound or straits.
- Vessel effects must include all forms of man-made sound such as airguns, construction, etc. Military sonar can be included here or in "other factors" meetings.
- Need to look at non-military sonar.

## DEFINING CONSERVATION

*Station introduction:* "The goal of a Conservation Plan for southern Resident killer whales is to conserve and restore the stock to its optimum sustainable population (OSP) and to maintain killer whales as a functioning part of the Puget sound ecosystem. OSP is defined as the number of animals that will result in the maximum productivity of the population, keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the habitat and health of the ecosystem."

*Questions asked to address:*

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*Input received:*

- Conservation can't happen or take place without the involvement and education of the general public. I would hope that once the conservation plan is established that the MEDIA point out ways to make a difference and what conservation of a fragile ecosystem looks like.
- Definition of conservation- population level relative to OSP/historical, population viability, level of genetic diversity, population trends, protection against threats, societal norm for protection.
- Types of expertise -- population dynamics, toxicology, disease, prey, effects of noise,

entanglement, military activities, oil spills, genetics, taxonomy, social science, education, political science, education, political science

- Agencies – NOAA Fisheries, DFO, Interior, Homeland Defense, Army Corps of Engineers, EPA, WDFW, San Juan County, museums

## WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

*Station introduction:* “Based on feedback during the meeting, a station was created for input on what actions could be undertaken right away while a conservation plan is being developed.”

*Questions asked to address:*

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*Input received:*

- Stop whale watching in Puget sound in the winter- keep winter habitat safe.
- Ask EPA for update and forecast of marine-effected toxic cleanup.
- Ask Navy to review all underwater sound transmissions as related to Southern Residents and their prey.
- ID and organize those state/county/city government agencies that already have programs to reduce toxic input into the marine environment (lawn chemicals, etc.), conserve water and energy (for salmonid habitat support). Get these agencies involved from the start. Team with the media (especially print media) to educate and recruit the public. Public lifestyle changes are essential.
- Consultation with USGS on seismic activities (trigger consultations with EPA, Interior, etc..)
- Creation of interagency task force (i.e. FEMA) to discuss issues such as oil spill, USGS activities.
- Add San Juan County enforcement for orca
- “Deputize” coast guard, M3, Whale Museum Soundwatch.
- Stop whale watching now
- Bring back Luna (reproductive male)
- Enforce MMPA in San Juan Islands and Puget Sound in the winter. Need enforcement who can issue tickets, fines.
- Don’t put all \$750,000 into research. Put some into action now and some into enforcement. Also outreach and education.
- Stop eating fish now.
- Stop farmed fish.
- Stop “noise” disturbance around farm fish pens.
- Meeting to address immediate management needs- i.e. manage whale watching beyond noise issues, dispel myth of more enforcement- need regs to enforce- better support of existing guidelines and educations/monitoring programs.
- Fund Soundwatch.